

281—56.8(259) Review, mediation and appeal processes. At all times throughout the rehabilitation process, individuals accessing any IVRS services shall be informed of the right to appeal or mediation and the procedures by which to file. If an individual is dissatisfied with any agency decision that directly affects the individual, the individual or designated representative may appeal that decision or request mediation. The term “appellant” shall be used to indicate the individual or designated representative who initiates an appeal. The appellant may initiate the appeal process either by calling a counselor or supervisor or by filing the appropriate division appeal form, available from any counselor or supervisor of the division. If the appeal process or mediation is initiated by telephone, the counselor or supervisor who received the call must complete the appeal form to the best of that person’s ability with information from the appellant. The division shall accept as an appeal or request for mediation a written letter, facsimile, or electronic mail that indicates that the applicant or job candidate desires to appeal or seek mediation. An appeal or mediation request must be filed within 90 days of notification of the disputed decision. Once the appeal form or request for mediation has been filed with the division administrator, a hearing shall be held before an impartial hearing officer (IHO) or mediator within the next 60 days unless an extension of time is mutually agreed upon or one of the parties shows good cause for an extension or one of the parties declines mediation. The appellant may request that the appeal go directly to impartial hearing, but the appellant shall be offered the opportunity for a supervisor review or mediation. The appellant may request assistance with an appeal or mediation from the Iowa client assistance program (ICAP) at any time in the appeal process.

56.8(1) Supervisor review. As a first step, the appellant shall be advised that a supervisor review of the counselor’s decision may be requested by notifying the counselor or supervisor in person, by telephone or by letter of the decision to appeal. If the supervisor has been involved in decisions in the case to the extent that the supervisor cannot render a fair and impartial decision or if the supervisor is not available to complete the review in a timely manner, the appeal and case file shall be forwarded to the bureau chief for review. The appellant is not required to request supervisor review as a prerequisite for appeal before an IHO; however, if a supervisor review is requested, the following steps shall be observed:

a. Upon receipt of a request for supervisor review, the supervisor shall notify all appropriate parties of the date and nature of the appeal; examine case file documentation; discuss the issues and reasons for the decision with the immediate counselor and other counselors who may have been previously involved with the case or issue; and, if necessary, meet with any or all parties to discuss the dispute.

b. The supervisor shall have ten working days from receipt of the request for supervisor review to decide the issue and notify the appellant in writing. A copy of the supervisor’s decision shall be sent to all appropriate parties.

c. If the supervisor’s decision is adverse to the appellant, the copy of the written decision given to the appellant shall include further appeal procedures, including notification that the appellant has ten days from the date of the letter to file further appeal.

d. As an alternative to, but not to the exclusion of, filing for further appeal, the appellant may request mediation of the supervisor’s decision or review by the chief of the rehabilitation services bureau.

56.8(2) Mediation. Regardless of whether a supervisor review is requested, an appellant may request resolution of the dispute through the mediation process. Mediation is also available if the appellant is dissatisfied with the supervisor’s decision. If mediation is requested by the appellant and agreed to by the division, the mediation shall be held within 60 days of the request for mediation. The following steps shall be observed by the parties. Mediation shall be conducted by a qualified and impartial mediator, as defined in 34 CFR Section 361.5(c)(43), trained in effective mediation techniques and selected randomly by the division from a list maintained by the division.

a. The mediation shall be conducted in a timely manner at a location convenient to the parties.

b. Mediation shall not be used to delay the appellant’s right to a hearing.

c. Mediation must be voluntary on the part of the appellant and the division.

d. Mediation is at no cost to the appellant.

e. All discussions and other communications that occur during the mediation process are confidential. Any offers of settlement made by either party during the mediation process are inadmissible if further appeal is sought by the appellant.

f. Existing division services provided to an appellant shall not be suspended, reduced, or terminated pending decision of the mediator, unless so requested by the appellant.

56.8(3) *Hearing before an impartial hearing officer.* Regardless of whether the appellant has used supervisor review or mediation or both, if the appellant requests a hearing before an IHO, the following provisions apply:

a. The division shall appoint the IHO from the pool of impartial hearing officers with whom the division has contracts. The IHO shall be assigned on a random basis or by agreement between the administrator of the division and the appellant.

b. The hearing shall be held within 20 days of the receipt of the appointment of the IHO. A written decision shall be rendered and given to the parties by the IHO within 30 days after completion of the hearing. Either or both of these time frames may be extended by mutual agreement of the parties or by a showing of good cause by one party.

c. The appellant shall be informed that the filing of an appeal confers consent for the release of the case file information to the IHO. The IHO shall have access to the case file or a copy thereof at any time following acceptance of the appointment to hear the case.

d. Within five working days after appointment, the IHO shall notify both parties in writing of the following:

- (1) The role of the IHO;
- (2) The IHO's understanding of the reasons for the appeal and the requested resolution;
- (3) The date, time, and place for the hearing, which shall be accessible and located as advantageously as possible for both parties but more so for the appellant;
- (4) The availability of the case file for review and copying in a vocational rehabilitation office prior to the hearing and how to arrange for the same;
- (5) That the hearing shall be closed to the public unless the appellant specifically requests an open hearing;
- (6) That the appellant may present evidence and information personally, may call witnesses, may be represented by counsel or other appropriate advocate at the appellant's expense, and may examine all witnesses and other relevant sources of information and evidence;
- (7) The availability to the appellant of the Iowa client assistance program (ICAP) for possible assistance;
- (8) Information about the amount of time it will take to complete the hearing process;
- (9) The possibility of reimbursement of necessary travel and related expenses; and
- (10) The availability of interpreter and reader services for appellants not proficient in the English language and those who are deaf or hard of hearing and the availability of transportation or attendant services for those appellants requiring such assistance.

e. Existing division services provided to an appellant shall not be suspended, reduced, or terminated pending the decision of the IHO, unless so requested by the appellant.

f. The IHO shall provide a full written decision, including the findings of fact and grounds for the decision. The appellant or the division may request administrative review, and the IHO decision is submitted to the administrator of the division. Both parties may provide additional evidence not heard at the hearing for consideration for the administrative review. If no additional evidence is presented, the IHO decision stands. Unless either party chooses to seek judicial review pursuant to Iowa Code chapter 17A, the decision of the IHO is final. If judicial review is sought after administrative review, the IHO's decision shall be implemented pending the outcome of the judicial review.

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